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ABSTRACT

During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the "New Religious Right" increasingly exerted influence on the development and implementation of educational policies and programs in the United States, particularly at the local level. The movement will probably continue to directly and indirectly affect several important school activities in which school psychologists have traditionally been involved. This paper identifies specific strategies employed by religious-right activists that affect the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists and describes strategies that school psychologists can use to overcome several obstacles posed by religious-right actions. Activists engage in indirect proselytization (by teachers and students), school-board takeovers at the local level, formation of vocal pressure groups, and endorsement of voucher policies. In response, school psychologists can: (1) increase their level of awareness about religious-right tactics at the local level; (2) develop ways to involve parents and community in the educational process; (3) share knowledge with other professionals (to demystify the role of school psychologists); (3) support school-linked comprehensive services for children and families; and (4) take an active advocacy role. (Contains 27 references.) (LMI)

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IMPACT OF THE "New Religious Right" ON SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the "New Religious Right" movement has had increasing influence on the development and implementation of policies and programs in our nation's public schools, especially at the local level. This movement has had, and likely will continue to have, both direct and indirect impact upon several important activities in which school psychologists traditionally have been involved as part of their responsibilities in our schools.

This paper has three major objectives: (1) to increase the current awareness level of school psychologists regarding the "New Religious Right" movement, especially its involvement with public school education; (2) to identify and discuss specific strategies employed by activists within this movement which are most likely to have a major impact upon the roles and responsibilities traditionally assumed by school psychologists in their professional activities; and (3) to identify and discuss specific strategies which can be employed by school psychologists to overcome several of the major obstacles which this movement poses not only to themselves as psychologists but also to the students and the families that they serve.

IMPACT OF THE "New Religious Right" ON SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' ACTIVITIES

During the late 1980s and the early 1990s the "New Religious Right" (NRR) movement has had increasing influence on the development and implementation of policies and programs in our nation's public schools (Dryfoos, 1994; Kaplan, 1994a; Lienesch, 1993). In particular, members of this movement (who often are referred to as the *New Christian Right*, the *Evangelical Right*, the *Evangelical Protestant Right*, or combinations of these labels such as the *Christian Coalition*) have attempted to influence educational curriculum and governance at the *local* level (Boston, 1994; Kaplan, 1994a, b; Yaffe, 1994).

Much better organized and more sharply focused than its predecessors of the early and mid 1980s, the "New Religious Right" has made a concerted effort to elect members who espouse their *profamily*, *non-secular*, and *conservative, fundamentalist* views to local school boards -- and this strategy has produced positive results in several states, e.g., Florida, Colorado, Texas, and Virginia (Davis, 1993; 1994a; 1995a; Diegmueller, 1994; Kaplan, 1994a).

CONSTITUENCY AND MISSION OF NRR

Who are the New Religious Right, what basic belief systems do they hold, and how are they attempting to have an impact upon current and future public school education in the United States? It is difficult to offer unequivocal responses to these questions due to the heterogeneous nature of the NRR membership itself as well as the variance which often exits relative to its specific activities. Nevertheless, some general observations involving the constituency, apparent motivations, and activities of the NRR in the area

public school education are offered in an effort to provide important background material relative to specific issue of "suggested impact of the NRR on the role and responsibilities of school psychologists."

Evolvement and Current Status

As recently as the mid-1980s, subsequent to a series of misadventures and miscalculations by its leaders, the Religious Right was dismissed by most political observers and religious spokespersons as a "collection of buffoonish has-beens." Yet, it has reemerged in the 1990s as a better organized and more sharply focused group (Kaplan, 1994a). No longer is the New Religious Right generally regarded by most politicians nor by most public school educators as harmless "religious fanatics" who have little power. While critics may disagree relative to the "real clout" that the NRR possesses (estimates of *active* membership vary widely with the most common estimate being approximately 5 million members) there is little doubt that the NRR increasingly is being taken more seriously by both politicians and public school administrators.

Clearly, the present influence of the NRR goes far beyond the field of education, with its impact being witnessed on a much broader socio-political scale. One needs to look no further than the "Contract with America" and the "Contract with the American Family" legislative proposals currently being considered in Congress to gauge the level of influence of the conservative, Religious Right today in the United States. It also is important to note that while the majority of the NRR influence continues to lie in the Republican party, several of the NRR agenda items (e.g., the issues of prayer in public school, abortion, homosexuality, school choice etc.) increasingly are receiving bipartisan support at all levels of government. In fact, several NRR agenda items which were once considered to represent the views of the "radical right"

presently are being touted as, and in some cases, fairly widely accepted as, being representative of the views of "mainstream America."

Unquestionably, the swing to the right in "political and social attitudes" during the mid-1990s has provided very fertile ground for the NRR to grow and to spread its message. Or, one might conceivably argue that the NRR and its pro-family, get-tough-on crime, back-to-basics education agenda has been one of the major driving forces in shaping the present political and social attitudes which prevail in our nation today. In any event, irrespective of how one's personal belief and value system may or may not be in concert with that of the NRR, it is important to recognize that the NRR movement is having an impact not only on the governance of our public schools today but also on its curricula, instructional strategies, and the support services which it offers, including several important activities in which school psychologists traditionally have been involved.

Membership of NRR

As defined by Scheuerer and Parkay (1992) the New Christian Right is "a national network of fundamentalist religious groups founded on a reverence for family, religion, and community ... and committed to authority, discipline, and a moral order based on a clear hierarchy of values and standards" (p. 112). It is important to note that the specific terminology currently employed to describe the membership of current fundamentalist religious groups varies considerably.

Among the most popular labels presently used to identify these groups are the following: *New Religious Right, Christian Right, New Christian Right, Religious Conservatives, Evangelical Right, Evangelical Protestant Right,* and the *Christian Coalition.* In this paper, the term *New Religious Right (NRR)* is

used to refer to members of conservative, fundamentalist religious groups who are "true believers, claiming a special closeness to God and believing that this connection must be translated into public policy, especially with regard to schools" (Kaplan, 1994a). It is recognized that not all of the above groups are united on all religious or political beliefs. However, members of the NRR typically share several common beliefs which serve as motivating forces for their involvement in public education.

Major Religious Right Organizations Involved in Education

Following are brief sketches of seven of the largest, best-organized, and most widely recognized conservative, religious right groups which have been actively involved in governance, curricula, and instructional issues involving public school education in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. Portions of the information contained in these sketches have been compiled by People for the American Way, a liberal, nonpartisan constitutional liberties organization and reported in Arocha (1993). The following group descriptions include membership estimates and key leaders (as of 1993) along with typical areas of school governance and curricula which have been targeted.

- *American Family Association* (Tupelo, MS). Founded in 1977, this group has been heavily involved in public school censorship activities, most notably in its efforts to ban an elementary textbook series, *Impressions*, which it alleges "promotes the religion of witchcraft." Membership estimates vary between 89,000 and 600,000, with 650 chapters nationwide (The Rev. Donald Wildmon, President).

- *Christian Coalition* (Chesapeake, VA). Founded by the Rev. Marion "Pat" Robertson in 1989, this powerful organization focuses a great deal of its energy and money on electing "Christian candidates" to local school boards

throughout the nation. In most states, it runs leadership schools to train potential candidates. Membership is estimated about 350,000 with 727 local chapters [recent membership estimates are closer to 1.6 million and 872 chapters] (Ralph Reed, Jr., Executive Director).

• *Citizens for Excellence in Education* (Costa Mesa, CA). Founded in 1983, this organization has been extremely active in efforts to challenge books, educational materials, and curricula, especially those dealing with drug abuse and self-esteem. Among the criticisms levied by this group against curricula designed to promote self-esteem and respect for others in children e.g., *Pumsy* (In Pursuit of Excellence), *Quest* (a K-12 anti-drug program developed by the Lions Club), and *DUSO* (Developing Understanding for Self and Others) are that they "encourage occultism, witchcraft, values clarification, Eastern mysticism, and psychological manipulation while undermining parental authority" and that "they teach children they don't have to rely on God." Also, this group has been extremely active in attacking outcome-based education (OBE) and working to get fundamentalist school board candidates elected. Membership is estimated at 130,000 with 1,210 local chapters (Rev. Robert Simonds, President).

• *Concerned Women for America* (Washington, DC). Founded in 1979, this group targets sex education curricula that is not abstinence-based and anti-drug and alcohol programs that emphasize the promotion of self-esteem in children and youth. Also, this organization has been active in the area of book censorship. Membership is estimated at 600,000 with 1,200 local chapters (Beverly LaHaye, President).

• *Eagle Forum* (Alton, IL). This organization, founded in 1972 with active branches currently in several states, is especially critical of sex education curricula that is not abstinence-based and includes HIV-AIDS material. Also, this group opposes "self-esteem" programs, and it has traditionally been very

active in literature censorship. In recent months, outcome-based education and other educational reform efforts (e.g., *Goals 2000*) have been vigorously attacked by this group, primarily through its monthly newsletter, *Education Reporter*. Membership is estimated at 80,000 (Phyllis Schlafly, President).

• *Focus on Family* (Colorado Springs, CO). Founded in 1977, this group has witnessed rapid growth during the 1990s, and it has been especially active in efforts to help "Evangelical Christians" get elected to local school boards. Headed by a counselor, this organization relies heavily upon the print and electronic media to publicize its agenda of "pro-family values" and its opposition to sex education programs that are not abstinence-based. Membership is estimated at 2 million (James Dodson, President).

• *Traditional Values Coalition* (Anaheim, CA). Founded in 1981, this organization largely has focused its efforts on criticism of the teaching of evolution and sex education programs that include information on birth control, disease prevention, and homosexuality. Membership is estimated to include 15,000 churches, primarily in California (Rev. Louis Sheldon, Chair).

NRR Beliefs

Ralph E. Reed, Executive Director of the Christian Coalition, the largest, and arguably the most influential, of all NRR groups, claims that his organization strongly supports our nation's public school system, is working diligently to improve it, and that its "agenda" involving public education has been grossly distorted by radical left-wing organizations like People for the American Way (Reed, 1993).

Reed (1993) suggests that the Christian Coalition has a mainstream agenda for public education that includes four basic principles: (1) to restore parental rights and parental involvement in public schools; (2) to free schools

from crime and drugs; (3) to return the school curriculum to "the basics" which has been whittled away by values clarification, multiculturalism, human sexuality courses, and outcome-based education; and (4) to provide greater school choice which will improve public education by introducing healthy competition.

NRR ATTACKS ON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The major targets of attack on U.S. public school education by members of the New Religious Right currently fall into four general areas: (1) curriculum and censorship, (2) outcome-based education (OBE), (3) sex education, and (4) full-service schools. Following are brief descriptions of the strategies which typically have been employed by NRR activists in each of these areas.

Curriculum and Censorship. For many years Christian Fundamentalists have attempted to serve as the "moral watchdogs" over the types of literature that our students are being exposed to in our nation's schools. In earlier periods, most of their censorship activities involved literature judged to be profane or containing unhealthy sexual overtones, and their usual targets were specific books such as Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (Boston, 1994).

However, during the late 1980s and the early 1990s, censorship activities of the rejuvenated New Religious Right have gone well beyond attacks on specific books, extending to entire educational curricula, instructional strategies, and materials which are viewed as being "morally dangerous." In particular, the NRR has targeted anti-drug and promotion of self-esteem curricula, programs, and materials which are frequently viewed by the NRR as relying on psychotherapy, "mind manipulation," and values clarification

while undermining "parental authority." Further, NRR activists often attack these curricula and programs as "promoting witchcraft and occultism" and teaching children that "they do not have to rely on God" (Boston, 1994).

Among the specific educational programs and practices which have been identified by various NRR groups in their publications as "suggested targets" that parents should issue complaints about to their local school boards, administrators, and teachers are the following:

- self-esteem and anti-drug programs (e.g., *Pumsy, Quest, Positive Action, Here's Looking at You 2000, Developing Understanding for Self and Others (DUSO)*, and *Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE)*
- individual and group mental health counseling
- psychological and psychoeducational student assessment
- instructional strategies designed to promote tolerance, respect, cooperation, conflict resolution, and values clarification among students, e.g., *Glasserian class meetings.*
- reading series such as Impressions assailed for promoting witchcraft
- integrated and thematic instruction
- whole-language approach to reading (especially when it relies on literature anthologies)
- relaxation and stress-reduction programs
- student suicide-prevention programs
- global studies and holistic health
- multicultural programs which emphasize diversity and respect for other cultures (especially if the curriculum includes material on homosexual lifestyles)
- cooperative learning and team teaching

- portfolio assessment
- inclusive education
- year-round schooling
- multi-age level programming
- performance-based education

Outcome-Based Education (OBE). Outcome-based education, a school reform effort currently being considered by many states, requires students to demonstrate proficiency in certain aspects of a subject before moving on to more advanced topics. It is designed to provide a framework for establishing high standards and for holding students accountable to meet them. It emphasizes the measurement of student achievement not by the number of classes taken or by the number of credits earned but rather by a demonstration of knowledge gained -- not only on tests but also in various projects and performances (Chion-Kenney, 1994).

However, OBE has been the recipient of a well-orchestrated, vigorous attack by the New Religious Right. In essence, OBE has been criticized by the NRR as "representing a conspiracy by secular humanist educators and New Age bureaucrats and politicians to usher in a new world order by engaging in a massive experiment in behavior modification and social engineering" (Chion-Kenney, 1994).

Robert Simonds, president, Citizens for Excellence in Education, and one of the most outspoken critics of OBE, argues that "affective" learning would occupy 47 percent of a typical OBE curriculum and that it would be complete with "witchcraft, shamanism, black magic, necromancy, hypnotism, and psychological manipulation of children's minds" ... "an insidious development to lock all children into mind control -- creating a robot citizenry" (Simonds, 1993, cited in Kaplan, 1994a, K6-K-7).

Underlying much of the NRR opposition to outcome-based education proposals are two major related factors: (1) the emphasis on "back to basics" -- public schools should restrict their instructional and curriculum activities to the areas of "reading, writing, and arithmetic"; and (2) the perceived fear and threat that the "government will seize total control of schools and, in the process, encourage the adoption by students of *values* (e.g., multiculturalism, acceptance and toleration of all sexual lifestyles etc.) which are inconsistent with those of fundamentalist Christians" (Arocha, 1993; Boston, 1994; Chion-Kenney, 1994; Kaplan, 1994a, b).

Sex Education. Always a controversial issue, NRR activists have been especially critical of sex education programs in our public schools. Frequently they demand that any references to contraception, abortion, or homosexuality be dropped from sex education programs. Further, many activists demand that if any sex education programs at all be offered by schools, only "abstinence-based" programs such as *Sex Respect* should be allowed.

NRR activists often demand that hundreds of items, including information on how condoms are used, sexually transmitted diseases, and especially material related to AIDS, be deleted from textbooks. In many instances, they have been very successful in having either school personnel delete items or in having textbook companies "pull their books entirely" rather than cave in to censorship efforts (Boston, 1994).

Full-Service Schools. The concept of *full-service schools* recently has emerged as a comprehensive effort to provide a wide array of needed services to children and families considered to be at risk. The major impetus for the growth of the full-service schools concept generally is attributed to Joy Dryfoos who for several years has been involved in "prevention research" involving high risk youth. Her book, *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in*

Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families (Dryfoos, 1994a) has served as the major driving force behind the full-service schools movement.

While full-service schools can vary considerably in their actual design and program offerings, their purpose is essentially the same: to provide better integrated, more easily accessible, and quality services to children and their families who are at risk. The essential feature of full-service schools is to provide a system which effectively connects the multiple needs of consumers (students and their families) with appropriate service providers in the education, health, mental health, social services, and recreational fields. It emphasizes a holistic, preventive approach for dealing with the "problems" frequently presented by children and youth -- "problems" which almost always are connected to those of their families and their communities (Davis, 1994a, 1995b).

School personnel, realizing that they cannot and should not be expected to fix the problems of large segments of today's youth, are desperately seeking help from other sources: the family, the community, and other agencies who are involved with children and their families at risk. The establishment of full-service schools, therefore, is considered by many to represent a viable effort to effectively respond to this call for help.

Many observers view schools as the most convenient and logical place to locate comprehensive, integrated services (mental health, medical, social and/or human services) for children and their families at risk. The concept of "one-stop shopping", using school sites as the base, frequently is viewed as a viable vehicle to provide integrated, supportive services to children and families.

In the eyes of the vast majority of the leaders and followers of the New Religious Right, however, full-service schools commonly are viewed as promoting secular humanism and are depicted as contributing to the demise of society (Schlafly, 1991; Simonds, 1993). In particular, objections are raised to the establishment of student health clinics in schools, sex education and sexuality curricula, and anti-drug and self-esteem programs. Almost any form of mental health counseling provided to students is regarded as "inappropriate" or even "evil." Individual and group counseling services offered to students typically are regarded as efforts to "exert mind control" and to "teach less reliance on God."

Likewise, the establishment of day care facilities in schools for the babies of young women students to encourage them to graduate typically is unacceptable to members of the New Religious Right, because these facilities generally are viewed as promoting immoral and irresponsible behavior. Finally, full-service schools have been severely criticized by the NRR for "eroding the primary, if not exclusive, mission of public schools: to teach academics" (Davis, 1994b, 1995a).

Proponents of full-service schools believe these arguments offered by the NRR represent a narrow vision of education and teaching and a denial of the harsh realities faced daily by large and growing numbers of youth and their families in contemporary American society. Urging schools to limit their mission to cognitive and academic achievement domains is "based on the erroneous assumption that children and youth can (or should) block out everything that may be interfering with their ability to focus on academics during the typical school day" (Davis, 1994b, p. 37).

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NEW RELIGIOUS RIGHT STRATEGIES

In the early and mid-1980s, the religious right wing generally employed secular humanism as its rallying point, and "televangelists" such as Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggert, Pat Robertson, and James Kennedy preached against this insidious secular "religion" that was destroying American society -- and American schools. Major emphasis was placed on censorship of school curriculum and books. Religious Right groups took several cases to court, hoping that the courts would define secular humanism as a religion and thus giving them a legal reason to call for banning secular humanism in our schools (Jones, 1993).

Their legal bids having failed, ultraconservative groups in the mid-1980s identified a new target: New Age thinking, and they developed a new list of fearsome indicators, with witchcraft the most predominant, to look for in school programs. While activists continue to be on the lookout for evidence of witchcraft and Satanism in school programs -- along with their continued efforts to "ban books and curricula" -- the 1990s have witnessed a major shift in strategies by the New Religious Right. These "new strategies" directed at public schools are more sophisticated, better organized and focused, and have been widely regarded as being more effective (Arocha, 1993; Boston, 1994; Diegmueller, 1994; Jones, 1993; Kaplan, 1994 a, b). Following is a brief discussion of these new strategies.

Proselytism by Teachers and Students. Aware that federal courts have consistently ruled that public schools have the right to terminate teachers who engage in direct proselytism of students, NRR activists generally recommend that "their teachers" engage in sectarian indoctrination by employing more subtle strategies.

Among the most common of these suggested strategies are the following: (1) using religious holidays to introduce sectarian themes into the classroom under the guise of teaching about the "cultural" aspects of the particular holiday; (2) posting and teaching about "historical documents" that contain religious references; and (3) attempting to introduce fundamentalist religious concepts of origins (creationism) into the classroom by demanding "equal time" or by creating a climate of confusion and intimidation leading many schools to water down or remove the teaching of evolution from science classes (Boston, 1994).

Proselytism by students has become increasingly popular in many of our nation's schools. Among the most common strategies which NRR activists encourage "their students" to employ in this regard are the following: (1) literature distribution of materials specifically targeted to public school students such as the newspaper, *Issues and Answers;* (2) student-led flagpole prayer sessions, especially encouraged to be held at the beginning of each school year -- and, on occasion, participated in by public school administrators and teachers; and (3) demanding that schools allow student-led bible clubs or prayer groups to be formed, citing alleged "equal access" violations of federal law (Boston, 1994).

Finally, Religious Right groups often employ still other methods of engaging in "disguised proselytism" in public schools. One strategy is the sponsoring of appearances in schools by suicide and anti-drug "counselors" who offer to provide their services at no cost. Usually these "counselors" lack any special training in psychology, suicide prevention, or substance abuse. While the in-school presentation may be largely secular, the "counselor" uses the opportunity to invite students to a social event later that night, e.g., a pizza party. The "party" often turns out be a revival service at a local fundamentalist

church at which the students receive their pizza only after they have been subjected to a high-pressure pitch to join the local church. A related practice involves the sending of high-profile, current or former professional athletes who work for such organizations as "Sports World Ministries" and "Athletes in Action" into public schools to give motivational talks. These athletes often invite students to religious events sponsored by local fundamentalist congregations (Boston, 1994).

School Board Takeovers at the Local Level. The most prominent new strategy of the NRR designed to have an impact on the governance and curriculum of public school education in the United States involves concerted efforts to get supporters elected to local school boards. Relying on what commonly has been referred to as a *stealth strategy* (Boston, 1994; Jones, 1993; Kaplan, 1994) the NRR has been successful in taking control of local school boards in several states, including California, Colorado, Texas, and Louisiana.

The *stealth strategy* essentially consists of putting forth and supporting little known candidates for election on campaigns that emphasize anticipated popular themes among voters, such as "back to basics", "traditional family values", "reducing violence in the schools", and "fiscal conservatism." The *real agenda* of the candidates, however, the promotion of Religious Right causes, is not revealed until the candidates are seated on the boards.

The NRR stealth strategy has been shown to be particularly effective in elections where voter turnout is anticipated to be low and/or in those situations wherein there exits little opportunity for citizens to obtain information on candidates, e.g., through the holding of public forums whereby candidates can be questioned by citizens relative to their views and any specific agendas which they may have for running for office. NRR stealth candidates, whose campaigns are often anchored in a large fundamentalist

church whose members work very hard to mobilize a large "congregation bloc vote" (Boston, 1994) often are encouraged to avoid participating in "candidate nights" in an effort to help them mask their underlying agendas until the election is over.

Pressure Groups. Even without direct representation on a local school board, the NRR can exert a powerful influence on its actions. A current strategy frequently used by members of the NRR is to form well-organized, specific issue-focused pressure groups that attend school board meetings on a consistent basis and make "demands" on its members.

Often posing as a group of "concerned parents", NRR supporters often demand that certain curriculum components, e.g., sex education, self-esteem programs, anti-drug programs etc., be removed or substantially modified. In-school activities conducted by counselors and school psychologists frequently are "questioned" by members of these groups, who almost always make an effort to keep their religious affiliations and agendas out of any discussions. Speaking either as "individual parents" or as groups of "concerned citizens", "concerned taxpayers", or "concerned parents" the strategy is very clear: to pack school board meetings with supporters, hoping to convince board members that they represent the "majority sentiment" of the community (Boston, 1994).

A related NRR pressure group activity is for parents to make excessive demands that their children be permitted to be "excused" from any school activity which they consider to be "offensive". In this regard, NRR groups such as the Eagle Forum provide their supporter parents with a lengthy list of targeted school activities which they may employ to seek "student exclusions."

Vouchers. Clearly, one of the most widely used strategies employed by NRR leaders and supporters in the mid-1990s is to apply pressure on federal

and state elected officials to adopt broad school tuition voucher policies. Under voucher programs, which represent an extension of the "parental choice" concept, parents would hold tuition vouchers, and they would have the right to enroll their children in the school of their choice. In effect, schools would be in the position of competing for tuition vouchers. Most current voucher plans under consideration, as well as those already implemented, limit the use of tuition vouchers to choices among public schools only. However, other voucher proposals under consideration, as well as those voucher programs already in operation, broaden the choice to both public and private schools.

Weyrich (1989) arguing that vouchers, even if restricted to choices among public schools only, allow the control over education to pass from the education bureaucracy to education consumers and suggests that "conservatives should welcome this development [vouchers] as a 'foot in the door' [extending vouchers to private schools as well]."

However, according to recent polls involving the attitudes of American citizens toward educational issues (e.g., the *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 1994*, as cited in Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1994) while the broader concept of parental choice has shown increasing popularity, the majority of citizens remain skeptical about the broad adoption of tuition voucher systems, especially if they involve extension to private schools.

As part of the nationwide *Kappan/Gallup Poll* (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1994), U.S. citizens were asked whether or not they approved of a plan whereby "government money would pay 'all or part' of a child's tuition if the parents chose to send their children to any public, private, or church-related school." The results indicated that 54 percent opposed this idea, while 45 percent supported it. Nonpublic school parents (representing 9 percent of

Americans) supported the voucher proposal (69% to 29%). Catholics (approximately 24 percent of Americans) approved the voucher idea by a 55 percent to 44 percent majority.

Some critics of the New Religious Right's active involvement in the voucher issue (e.g., Boston, 1994; Jones, 1993; Kapplan, 1994a) interpret this intensified level of involvement as having a deeper, more sinister motivation. In brief, they suggest that the NRR's recent rhetoric and activity involving vouchers (as well as with their attacks on outcome-based education and sex education programs) represent semi-covert cover-ups for their real agenda: to destroy our nation's public school system, and in the process, to divert money, which would normally go to support public schools, to support their own religious school -- and, even more troublesome, to place themselves in a better position to shape the values of current and future youth to those which are more attuned to their belief system.

IMPACT UPON SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

The recently intensified involvement of the New Religious Right in issues involving public school education throughout the United States has had, and likely will continue to have, substantial impact upon the traditional roles and responsibilities of school psychologists. Some of this suggested impact lies in the domain directly related "typical job responsibilities" such as student counseling and student assessment. However, the suggested impact, although more indirect, may be even greater in the broad areas of "school purpose" and "school operation."

School psychologists never have been viewed as being among the most favored people by members of most Religious Right groups. Or, for that matter, neither have representatives of almost any other "mental health" or "social

services" profession. As alluded to several times earlier in this paper, Religious Right activists consistently have attacked psychologists, school guidance counselors, and other mental health professionals for their perceived engaging in "mind manipulation" activities which are designed to "promote undisciplined, reactionary behavioral patterns" in children and youth, while simultaneously, "encouraging them to become less respectful of parental authority -- and less dependent on God for direction."

However, the "message" of the New Religious Right involving what is "wrong with public education in America" and "what is needed to fix it" currently is being considered by many to represent a more "mainstreamed" message. This appears to be especially true in those situations in which the suggested real "message" and agendas that NRR activists are attempting to put forth are adroitly masked by popular themes which resonate well with "mainstream America in 1995": improving a deteriorating public school system by employing higher student *academic* standards and focusing on the "academic basics", reducing school violence, promoting "family values", and cutting school budgets.

Where and how do school psychologists fit into this "new message of educational reform?" Presumably, not very much, nor very well -- if one were to follow the dictates of the "more mainstreamed" NRR. At best, school psychologists have been viewed by most NRR activists as being "unnecessary frills" whose activities only serve to erode valuable school time from "academics." At worst, they are viewed as "dangerous people who engage in mind manipulation with their children."

It is important to note that criticism of the "increasing role and responsibilities" of professionals such as school psychologists in our nation's public schools in recent years is not limited to NRR activists. Several

educational reformers (Bennett, 1988; Finn, 1991) have suggested that the most effective method of improving the overall quality of our nation's school systems is to return them to their primary mission: the teaching of academic subjects; and to drastically reduce, or eliminate, the schools' involvement in social service programs which have been made available to students.

One of the most recent national reports which urges schools to return to their "basic mission" of teaching academic skills was the widely disseminated *Putting Learning First: Governing and Managing the Schools for High Achievement* (Committee for Economic Development, 1994). This report argues that public education in this country has "lost its sense of priorities: and needs to return to its primary mission: improving student learning and academic achievement." This report specifically argues that "schools are not social-service institutions," they should not be expected to deliver or pay for health or social services for students, and they need to "clear away the *extraneous* and the *secondary* and put learning and achievement first."

Clearly, the recommendations contained in the *C.E.D* report, which have received a great deal of national visibility, are welcomed with enthusiasm by New Religious Right advocates who consistently work toward eliminating health services and mental health services in public schools. The implication that these services to students are *secondary* and *extraneous* serves their agenda very well. It provides them with further ammunition to support their rallying cry that "schools should be places in which academics are taught -- not places in which psychological services are provided" (Davis, 1994b).

As related to the field of school psychology, the real danger of the increased and intensified involvement of the NRR in public school governance and curriculum issues is that it has the strong potential to have a serious, adverse impact upon the overall well-being of large and growing

numbers of children and youth who are very vulnerable and at high risk in today's society. Because of the well-documented deteriorating social, family, and community conditions which exist in our nation today (e.g., rising child poverty rate, increase in number of single-parent families, rising numbers of substantiated child abuse and neglect reports, alarming increase in reports of child and teen violence, increase in child and teen suicide rate, etc.) most objective observers would agree that unprecedented numbers of children and youth would benefit from receiving a wide range of mental health services.

Children and youth in 1995 are being required to cope with a whole host of factors and conditions which tend to produce varying degrees of stress in their lives -- factors and conditions which not only affect their "ability to learn" but also to *live* in a society which is often chaotic, dangerous, and lacking in support. Yet, despite this reality, several forces are working against the provision of mental health services in schools to children who may desperately require them.

School budgets in many communities are being cut at alarming rates. Schools are being pressured to develop high academic standards and to drastically improve student achievement scores. In brief, schools today are regularly being asked to "do more with less." Nonacademic programs and support services to students increasingly are being viewed as extraneous. For the above reasons, as well as for many others, the continued provision of mental health services and programs to students -- at least at the rate which we have become accustomed -- is in serious jeopardy. This is ironic in that many would argue that students in 1995 need more, not fewer, opportunities to access mental services.

The suggested major impact of the New Religious Right is precisely in this area. The "timing" of their increased involvement in educational issues is

especially dangerous and troublesome. Their agendas, especially those related to the promulgation of fears and criticisms involving psychological and mental health services, fit uncomfortably well into the broader agenda of both educational reformers and American citizens at-large who view the "pursuit of high academic standards" and "greater emphasis on academics" as being the *solution* to our nation's "troubled school systems."

It is one thing for NRR parent supporters to attempt to offer a strong case for the "dangers of mental health services and programs" to their *own children.* This is their right, and it should be respected. Yet, it is quite another thing should their "agenda" be employed by policymakers and administrators, inadvertently or not, to influence the types of services and programs which should be available to *all other* (the vast majority) children and youth. This is *not* their right.

STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS RELATED TO THE NEW RELIGIOUS RIGHT

The recent increased involvement in educational governance and curriculum by the NRR not only has the potential of having a strong impact upon the current and future activities of school psychologists, but also it calls for proactive reaction on the part of all school psychologists. Serious, concentrated efforts on the part of school psychologists to actively combat the NRR agenda are necessary not only to preserve the integrity of their profession, but also -- and more importantly -- to insure that children and youth in today's and tomorrow's society are not denied access to those mental health-related services and programs which they require.

How may school psychologists most effectively have a positive impact involving issues and concerns related to the New Religious Right? The

following strategies are suggested as effective vehicles for their involvement in this area.

Increase Level of Awareness

First, school psychologists need to increase their level of awareness regarding the strategies and tactics currently being employed by the New Religious Right in their efforts to influence the future of public school education in our nation. It is important that school psychologists become increasingly familiar with these strategies and tactics being used by the NRR at all levels of government: federal, state, and local. However, awareness of NRR agendas and strategies at the *local school and community level* is especially important for it is at this level where school psychologists are most likely to have opportunities to act in a responsive manner to thwart NRR efforts.

It is important that school psychologists understand that it is not the goal of *all* members of the New Religious Right to "destroy public school education." It is not the intent of this paper to suggest that a broad brush should be used to paint all members of the NRR as dangerous, manipulative people who are "out to get public education." Clearly, this is not true. Further, some of the criticisms presently being levied against public school education by the NRR arguably have some merit, and they should be considered.

For example, a common theme running through the NRR agenda involving public school education in the United States is that parents are not allowed sufficient levels of control of, and input into, their children's education. It is a basic tenet of the NRR that U.S. schools operate in a fashion which not only does not promote active parent involvement but also, at times, in ways which appear to discourage this very involvement. Unfortunately, in

many situations, this observation appears to be very accurate. Our public schools must continue to develop more effective and meaningful ways to "involve parents and the community at-large in the educational process."

Likewise, it is difficult to argue against the commonly stated NRR position that our nation's public school system overall is not doing a very effective job of preparing most students in academic areas. Far too many students leave school undereducated and unprepared to lead productive adult lives. Again, most citizens agree that our schools must demonstrate substantial improvement in this area. Yet, the basic methods currently being suggested by the NRR to "fix public school education" are not only very short-sighted and overly simplistic, but they also have the potential of being very dangerous and counterproductive.

Even if one disregards any of the suggested "ulterior motives" which leaders and members of the NRR may have for their involvement in education, their proposed solutions to improve public schools are extremely dangerous as they do not reflect, nor do they address, the multiple, complex problems and needs of today's children and youth. If, for example, students are denied access to basic mental services and health services in schools -- as the NRR advocates -- one can only speculate, given the current deteriorating health and social status of American children and youth as measured by several key indicators, about the dire circumstances that will almost assuredly result.

In particular, the "New Religious Right" has mounted strategic and, arguably very effective, attacks on the full-service schools movement. In many communities, school officials have "caved in" to the increasing pressures being applied by fundamental religious and other conservative groups by eliminating mental health services and on-site health clinics for students. School psychologists can play a major role in this regard by helping

school administrators, parents, and other community members understand the value of providing these services to students who need them.

Clearly, school psychologists can use their increased level of awareness about NRR strategies to take those actions necessary to restrict potentially dangerous NRR influence upon educational policies and curriculum.

Share Knowledge

Second, school psychologists must be prepared and willing to share their knowledge and their discipline's research findings with professionals from other fields, with school administrators and teachers, and with members of the community to emphasize the potential negative consequences which are likely to occur for many children and youth should the NRR agenda involving education be implemented. School psychologists arguably are in the best position to emphasize the importance of not neglecting the mental health needs of children and youth who are experiencing increasing levels of stress in today's schools and society.

Given the admittedly low level of acceptance and respect in which most mental health professionals are held by the members of the NRR, it is important that school psychologists, in their efforts to convince others of the advantages of providing mental health services to students, focus on *specific* examples and results of specific benefits for children and youth. It usually is of little advantage, for example, to attempt to attack NRR arguments per se against psychological counseling. This strategy frequently plays right into the hands of NRR advocates for it allows them engage in what is one of their most successful tactics: delaying or blocking the implementation of certain programs or services (e.g., psychological counseling or student self-esteem building activities) which they find "offensive" by introducing exaggerated

examples of "harm" which certain students in the past allegedly have suffered by being exposed to these programs or services.

Often, members of the NRR will employ "scare tactics" in an effort to raise "reasonable doubt" in the minds of parents relative to established or proposed mental health programs in schools. For example, subsequent to the occurrence of an apparent suicide of a "popular student" in a particular school, rumors are spread that the student had just begun to see the school psychologist for counseling. Not only is the efficacy or value of the "counseling" questioned but also the "thought" is planted that possibly the former student-counselor interaction may have, in some manner, actually contributed to the student's taking his/her own life.

Also, other "rumors are spread" that several other students in this school have been "talking about suicide." The suggested possible objective of this tactic: to attempt to raise a sufficient level of doubt in the minds of the broader mainstream of parents whose children attend this school about the possible harmful effects of "psychological counseling." With sufficient doubt raised relative to the "value" of and the "need" for counselors, especially in a period of tight school budgets, is any wonder, then, that many mental health positions in our public schools have become increasingly vulnerable in the mid 1990s?

Similar suggested strategies are employed by members of the NRR to undermine the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists in other areas. The subjects of sex education programming and sexuality counseling have become especially targeted by the NRR. Again, a favorite tactic of the NRR in these areas is to use scare tactics to "raise doubt" in the minds of parents and other community members relative to the "real purpose" of these in-school programs and activities. Rumors are spread, for example, that

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students not only are being taught to tolerate and respect "homosexual lifestyles" but that this type of sexual orientation is actually being *promoted* as part of these activities in schools.

School psychologists can play an important role in helping to defuse these rumors and to dispel the many myths surrounding mental health services for students. Again, the most effective strategy to combat these rumors and myths is to provide others with honest, straightforward information and the results of relevant research. For example, most parents recognize that children and teenagers today are being exposed to situations and conditions which can produce varying degrees of conflict, confusion, and frustration in their lives. They further realize that these stresses can not only have an adverse effect upon their school performance but also on their interpersonal relationships with parents and peers. Finally, most parents wish to see their children succeed and they presumably would not be opposed to their getting the "necessary help" in this regard.

Sharing the results of the existing vast, generally widely-accepted body of research literature which focuses on the adverse effects of anxiety on children's school performance and overall life adjustment, arguably will make sense to most parents. This is especially likely to be the case if this information is shared with parents by school psychologists in as jargon-free and "natural manner" as possible. The use of case studies and illustrations which provide specific examples of how children and youth, as a result of being involved in a counseling relationship, have been able to develop effective coping strategies to overcome negative circumstances or conditions in their lives can be an effective and convincing tool.

Too often, school psychologists, as well as other mental health professionals, are perceived by many parents as sort of "mystics" or as persons

whose service are required only in those situations which have reached an extremely serious level. It is not so much that most parents have a basic distrust of school psychologists or that they have a fear of what they do in schools. And, certainly they typically do not view them as dangerous "mind controllers of their children" whose goal is to teach their children parental distrust or to encourage them to become homosexuals (the portrayal of school psychologists frequently presented by members of the NRR). Rather, the reality is that most parents have had limited, or no, contact with a school psychologist. Often, these parents most likely have viewed the school psychologist, if indeed there is one in their school, as one who "works with those really messed-up kids -- certainly, not their own."

This is why it is so very important for school psychologists to make a concerted effort to be more visible at school activities and at local school board meetings. Their perceived "mystique" needs to be "demystified." The typical responsibilities of school psychologists within the area of prevention should be made clear. They must be seen as working more within the "mainstream of the school." Parents who come to recognize the school psychologist as one who is involved in a wide range of school activities and as one who doesn't only work with "those really disturbed kids" presumably will be far more unlikely to buy into the "scare rhetoric of the NRR" when it is employed at local school board meetings.

Research and Evaluation

Third, school psychologists can assist in combating the negative impact which the New Religious Right can have upon public school programs by supporting such concepts and programs as *full-service schools*, especially with respect to their current research and evaluation needs. Some

encouraging progress already has been witnessed in this regard. For example, as a result of a research agenda-setting conference focusing on school-linked comprehensive services for children and families co-sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, and the American Educational Research Association, held during the fall of 1994, several critical "research and evaluation needs" were identified (U.S. Department of Education & American Educational Research Association, 1995).

Among the research and evaluation questions which participants at this conference listed as being in immediate need of addressing were the following:

- How can research address the *measurement of outcomes* that reflect not only the goals of the schools, but also multiple agencies? What new research strategies or ones not traditionally used are needed to consider the multiple variables associated with school-linked comprehensive services?;
- What has been the impact of previous research about school-linked comprehensive services on practice?;
- How do we describe *relational qualities such as mentoring, respect, and caring* and make them count in evaluation? What research measures are needed to evaluate program-specific goals of school-linked services such as collaboration, family-based outcomes, or client satisfaction?;
- How can the need for *longitudinal research* on collaborative practices be recognized and assured in policymaking?;
- What steps need to be taken to assure that both *culturally sensitive research and client-driven research* are part of the agenda?; and

- What new strategies are needed to *communicate research findings* to broad, non-professional audiences? (U.S. Department of Education & American Educational Research Association, 1995).

School psychologists currently are being presented with both a valuable opportunity and also with an exciting challenge to offer their expertise by participating actively and enthusiastically in efforts to promote full-service schools throughout the United States, especially within the area of research and evaluation.

Advocacy Through Involvement In Broader NRR Controversy

Finally, it is suggested that school psychologists must take an active role in current broad-based efforts to defeat the attack of the New Religious Right on public school education in the United States. The recent more sophisticated and better organized strategies of the NRR involving issues of education governance and curriculum clearly go well beyond issues and concerns that are of specific interest to school psychologists. However, because these NRR-sponsored activities are suggested to have the potential to produce such negative outcomes, directly or indirectly, for so many children and youth who attend public schools, it is imperative that school psychologists become more active participants in the contemporary dialogue involving the NRR.

School psychologists, both as individuals and collectively, as members of their profession, have a responsibility (read, *obligation*) to advocate for policies and programming practices at all levels (national, state, and local) that promote a better quality of life for our nation's most troubled children and families. While school psychologists clearly must maintain their highest level of professional integrity in ensuring that their recommendations are

based upon nonpartisan, objective, empirical evidence, they, nevertheless, *cannot afford not to act.*

Increasing numbers of children and families today are in serious trouble. They desperately need our help *now*! School psychologists must be willing to take a strong stand against many of the potentially dangerous ideas involving public schools which are being promulgated by the NRR -- ideas, which if not challenged, will only exacerbate the multiple and complex problems faced by many children and youth today. School psychologists should form active partnerships with other individuals and groups who currently are attempting to mount a public, grassroots counter-attack against the NRR movement involving public education. Some of the strategies which have been suggested as being among the most effective in this regard have been offered by the *People for the American Way (1994):*

- Do not focus the debate on the extent of the Religious Right's strength or exaggerate the "threat" it poses. It is not the Religious Right's existence -- or its putative power -- that Americans object to but rather what it wants to do.
- Always remember that this is a right for the mainstream, which will be won by addressing the concerns and values of ordinary Americans. Voters often feel left out of today's arguments between the Religious Right and progressives. This leaves both sides on the margins, with the middle up for grabs.
- When appropriate, criticize the Religious Right for trying to use government to impose its religious values on others, thereby mixing religion and politics in an inappropriate way. This is what most limits its appeal with voters.
- Whenever possible, engage the religious Right in fights over

specific issue positions, rather than general values, and force its leaders to defend their most extreme positions.

- Speak to Americans' strong conviction that the nation is experiencing a serious decline in moral values. Avoid getting positioned outside the mainstream on questions of core values.
- Highlight the limited range of values advocated by the Religious Right, and challenge its claim to speak for all moral and religious Americans.
- Do not allow the Religious Right to define political differences as a debate over the importance or value of religion. Although Americans do not favor government promoting particular religious views, they do want more religion in their society.
- Do not compromise your creditability by employing exaggerated language.
- Reach out to less-educated and lower-income voters.
- Educate younger Americans about the Religious Right; they reject much of the agenda, but are also the least concerned about its influence (p. 3).

As a concluding perspective -- as was stated earlier in this paper, it is one thing for NRR leaders and supporters to offer legitimate, and often deserved, criticisms of the public school education system in the United States, or to attempt to offer a strong case for the "dangers of mental health services and programs" to their *own children*. This is their right, and it should be respected. Yet, it is quite another thing should their "agenda" be employed by policymakers and administrators, inadvertently or not, to influence the types of services and programs which are generally viewed as positive and which should be available to *all other* (the vast majority) children and youth. This is

not their right. School psychologists must take an active role to ensure that this does not happen.

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